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RETHINKING POPULISM WITH PIERRE ROSANVALLON

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Abstract. In times of growing populism throughout the world, the article offers a rethinking of its nature and manifestations with the help of Pierre Rosanvallon's critical democratic theory. The French social thinker offers a comprehensive concept of this world phenomenon as a product of democracy and its borderline form. In line with his approach of considering each phenomenon in its theoretical and historical dimensions, Rosanvallon derives the "invariant elements" of populism, traces their manifestations from the late 19th century to the present day, critiques key theoretical ideas of populism as they have been applied in practice, and suggests various ways to overcome the aporias of populism arising from the structural indeterminacy of democracy. Rosanvallon's analysis was used to pose questions specific to contemporary Bulgarian society.

Keywords: Pierre Rosanvallon; populism; critical theory of democracy; aporias of democracy; "democratorship"

Introduction

Anyone familiar with the work of the French researcher Pierre Rosanvalon will not be surprised by the invitation to (re)think populism with the help of his analyses. Award-winning specialist in the history and theory of democracy, author of over thirty books on fundamental issues of political sociology and political science and current problems of the construction and functioning of contemporary societies¹, professor at the Collège de France of modern and contemporary political history (2001 – 2018), Rosanvallon published in 2020 the monograph *The Century of Populism. History, Theory, Critique (Le siècle du populisme. Histoire, théorie, critique)*. The intention is ambitious, the realization at the height of the author's powerful theoretical culture and uncompromising critical spirit. In times of growing populism throughout the world, the French social thinker sets himself the task of conceptualizing this global phenomenon based on its historical evolution from the end of the 19th century to the present day, not to reject and denounce it, but to justify ways for revitalizing democracy as a real alternative to the populist wave, suffocating both forms of civil activity and the democratic functioning of institutions.

However, this is not just another book in the publishing boom of literature devoted to populism, proportional to the speed with which the phenomenon is spreading around the world. Rosanvallon's monograph is a non-conjunctural, in-depth study of populism that examines the phenomenon through the prism of the history of democracy in order to reveal its essence, genesis, and multifaceted manifestations. Convinced that the most effective action against the processes eroding democracy is to know them, Rosanvallon undertakes a dissection of populism (it is no coincidence that the first chapter of the book is entitled "Anatomy"), on the basis of which he derives the main characteristics of populist political culture. It is their manifestations that he traces in the historical evolution of the phenomenon (chapter "History") and subsequently subjects to critical analysis (chapter "Critique"). Although formally distinct, the three chapters of the book together build the overall theory of populism as a product of democracy. Its scientific coherence and explanatory power derive from the way it is constructed. In order to overcome existing interpretations of populism that emphasize its individual elements (parties, electorate) and propose typologies based on external, quickly ascertainable, and sometimes presupposed features (division of populisms into right and left), Rosanvallon turns to establishing of the "invariant elements" of the phenomenon and the "differentiation rules" of its manifestations (Rosanvallon 2020, p. 3).

With the developed ideal-typological model of populism, the author analyzes its historical manifestations, arriving at a general typology of democratic forms, one of which is populism as the borderline form of the democratic project. Thus, the theorization acquires an empirical density and with it moves to a higher conceptual level by revealing the aporias of populist ideology that are dialectically removed in the critique of populism. In fact, the key to understanding populism lies in the very critique of the theoretical foundations of democracy on which populist ideology grows, and hence the possible countermeasure to its influence is the continuous upgrading of the unfinished democratic project.

The phenomenon of populism

Starting from the premise of the structural indetermination of democracy and the various uses of its aporias, Rosanvallon traces the significant changes of basic ideas of the theory of democracy (about the people, the democratic construction of society, the representativeness, the economy) under the influence of economic, political and social transformations that drive and fuel populist political culture. He distinguishes five of its constitutive elements and describes them meaningfully: the idea of the people, the concept of democracy, the specific notion of representation, the political and philosophical notion of economy, and the regime of passions and emotions.

If the people are the central figure of democracy, the way in which the various populist currents treat the people both sets them apart from all other political movements and unites them to the point of indistinguishable from one another. Pierre Rosanvallon starts from the classical division between "people-civil body" and "people-social body", and

shows its “overcoming” by populist movements, fueled by real political and economic processes. The decrease in voter turnout as an expression of distrust in traditional parties and of the growing sense of political unrepresentativeness, the expanding marginalization and feeling of rejection and non-recognition in the new forms of exploitation, regulation and domination since the beginning of the XXI century lead to the erasure of the borders between the people as a civil subject and the people as a collective image of certain social classes. This, called by Rosanvallon as early as 1998, the “unfound people” (“*peuple introuvable*”), which the political parties find difficult to identify, has been skillfully captured and amalgamated by the populists in the opposition “us” against “them” (elites, oligarchs, rulers). Not without the intellectual help of one of the biggest defenders of left populism – Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. The populist project for the restoration of democracy they defend is built around the idea that under neoliberal capitalism there is only one line of demarcation, that between the holders of power (economic, political, social, cultural) and the rest of society – the people, in which social categories are obliterated by new forms of domination and discrimination beyond the relations of private property and production (Laclau 2005; Mouffe 2018). Analyses of the social world in class terms become invalid because all the exploited, discriminated, marginalized, oppressed have a common enemy, no matter what it may be called caste, oligarchy, elite or system. Antagonism is brought to the extreme and all those who are not part of the elite are recognized as “the people”. Thus, “the word “people” gives language to the confused feelings of many citizens” (Rosanvallon 2020, p. 32) – the disconnect between “top” and “bottom”, rejection, the feeling of invisibility and non-recognition.

“In its very indeterminacy, it appears to be open to the sensitive and concrete life of each individual. It gives a collective form to a society of individuals by welcoming singularities. [...] We can also proudly claim to be of the people while feeling vaguely ashamed to be defined by diminutive criteria (being unemployed, living on minimum wage, struggling to make ends meet, having few qualifications...). The word thus serves both to shout out in anger and to display a quarter of nobility” (*Ibid.*, p. 33).

It is this new positive use of the word “people”, which erases the tension between the people-citizen and the social people and unites all the discontented, that populist movements are embracing. It becomes the basis on which the populist vision of democracy and just governance of society and the economy grows.

Populists propose “direct, polarized and immediate democracy” in opposition to the existing liberal and representative democracies, reducing, in the populist view, the democratic ideal. Only direct polling of the people can lead to liberation from the corrupt and incompetent elites. In all populist movements at every stage of their development, the referendum has been raised in a cult as the surest means of opposing the usurpation

of the people's sovereignty by a representative-parliamentary system. The apologia of direct democracy leads to the rejection of the legitimacy of any other power (above all the judiciary) that does not derive from the will of the people expressed in elections. Thus, the elected representatives of the people are opposed to the representatives of all other institutions (constitutional court, independent instances), which did not receive the sanction of the universal vote. In this sense, according to Rosenvallon, one can speak of a polarized, ultra-electoralist, proceduralist notion of democracy. The quality of the institutions and the principles of their functioning, in which the essence of democracy is expressed, do not matter at all. The opposition between law and democracy has been radicalized to the extent that the legal guarantees of the people vis-à-vis their representatives have been rejected, and democracy has been reduced to the exercise of power by the political force that has obtained an electoral majority. In the populist vision, this power is the complete form of democracy precisely because it is the result of a direct and immediate popular vote, and the one who most fully represents and embodies it is the leader or "man-people". Rosanvallon traces the roots of the notion of the leader as "pure *organ* of the people" (*Ibid.*, p. 52), constituting the populist vision of political representation, in Latin American societies in the 1930s and 1940s, in which forms of latifundist and oligarchic domination created exploited, disenfranchised but still class-unstructured masses. A century later, highly fragmented modern societies without a clearly socially structured electorate are once again a favorable ground for rejecting classical parties, on the one hand, and for identifying with newly emerging leaders – unifiers and expressers of the common discontent of increasingly differentiated groups.

Another element of populist ideology highlighted by Pierre Rosanvallon is protectionism. Without being inherent only to populism, its specific mobilizing force is due to the way in which populism "exploits" the theme of protecting the national economy, markets and labor force. By raising issues of unemployment, social declassification, and the increase in the cost of living, which are sensitive to the majority of people, the populists manage to link them with the issues of sovereignty and political will, justice and equality, and national security in their proposed concept of protectionist economic policy. It is necessary because free movement and globalization confiscate the *will* and *power* of the people, ceding them to anonymous mechanisms and invisible experts, taking away their sovereignty through the migration processes they stimulate. National-protectionist economics must preserve equality, which, understood in populist terms, means "entering into a homogeneous whole" and keeping others (foreigners, unwanted groups, enemies) at bay (*Ibid.*, pp. 59 – 60). Thus, protectionism also becomes a security tool supporting national cohesion.

Populism is no exception to another trend in contemporary political currents – the use of passions and emotions for political purposes. Rosanvallon distinguishes three groups of emotions – emotions of position, emotions of intellection, emotions of action that populism masterfully mobilizes in favor of its own conception of democracy. And therein lies its attractive power. The feeling of disregard, neglect, abandonment of those

in a disadvantaged social position is presented as “discontent with democracy”, i.e. with the elites’ distorted project for an equal and just society. Intellectual confusion and a sense of incomprehension fuel all kinds of conspiracy theories and fake news that offer simple and easily digestible explanations for a world order run by oligarchs in which ordinary people are pawns or powerless observers. And here comes the place of the emotions of action and intervention, the aim of which is the expulsion of the rulers as a whole. If the basis of these emotions is the decline of the three invisible, in the Rosanvallon’s words, institutions – authority, trust and legitimacy, the ideological and practical advantage of populism is that it radicalizes and absolutizes emotions in a “negative politics”, “under the species of an indistinct and non-negotiable rejection” (*Ibid.*, p. 73). There is no longer any space for deliberation in this framework. No more space for an argument based on the idea that an “effective community of minds” can exist (Perelman, Olbrechts-Tyteca 1970).

The historical evolution of populism

A keen connoisseur of the ideological history of democracy and the political history of democratic regimes, Pierre Rosanvallon traces the evolution of populism, distinguishing three main moments – the first one of Caesarism and authoritarian democracy in France during the reign of Napoleon III, did not simply develop the ideas of Bonapartism, but justified and put illiberalism into practice with the prohibition of parties and the subordination of the media in the name of popular sovereignty; the moment of the first crisis of the democratic model in the oldest democracies – the USA and France at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century (1890–1914), which unleashed a powerful anti-parliamentary wave and populism, restrained thanks to the renewal of democratic institutions², and the moment of the so-called “populist” Latin American movements and regimes of the 1930s – 1940s, which for the first time impressively combined democratic ideals and totalitarian leanings.

However, the most interesting part of this historical analysis is the conceptual history, whose analytical vector is Rosanvallon’s theory of the indeterminations of democracy. In its perspective, populism is a form of democracy trying to resolve the aporias that structure it. The first aporia is that of “unfound people”. The idea of the sovereign people – a pillar of democratic ideas and concepts – is the most discussed topic. The indicated distinction between the people-civil body and the people-social body refers to different substances. If in the first case it is an electoral subject in its entirety, in the second – the social subject is multiple and divided into different social categories, bearers of different opinions. In the search for the non-existent totality of the people, populism not only amalgamates these two substances, but ignores a third manifestation of it, which has no substantial order – the people-principle.

“It is made up of the general equivalent that underpins the project to include everyone in the city: equality. It is defined by a mode of composition of the common good.

Representing it means bringing this principle to life, preserving what is the most structurally and obviously public good: fundamental rights. These rights are, in the true sense of the word, non-rival public goods: all can benefit from them without anyone being deprived. ... In them [in the rights – SK] the whole and the parts of society are perfectly linked. Respect for them implies that all voices are heard, that all margins are taken into account. The subject of the law is therefore the very figure of this people: he reduces its multiple determinations to the essential; he embodies it in a way in which all can recognise themselves” (*Ibid.*, pp. 149 – 150).

To the extent that the sovereign power of the people is not exercised directly, conceptions of democracy face the second structuring aporia of ambiguities of representative democracy, oscillating between a vision of representative government as an “elective aristocracy” and a vision of direct, immediate democracy. In the language of voters, this means a tension between aspirations to be governed by competent and capable rulers and the desire for elected officials to reflect their expectations and speak their language. On the other hand, the historical imperative of impersonal power as an expression of the democracy-founding principle of the general will is empirically refuted by the political evolution of societies. Populist attacks on parliamentarism lead to the strengthening of executive power, and the demand for accountability raises the question of the personalization of power in democratic governance. Added to this is the crisis of representativeness, which fuels populist aspirations for the leadership embodiment of power.

The regime of equality is the fourth structuring aporia of democracy. The tension stems from the very essence of democracy, which, in addition to being a political regime, is also a societal form. It embodies the ideal of a society of equal citizens not only in terms of law, but also in terms of freedom and dignity.

„The different conceptions of equality, writes Rosanvallon, entail material and institutional consequences that are much more important than those linked to the ways in which suffrage is exercised [...]. The reference to the same democratic ideal can thus refer to a whole variety of regimes of equality, symmetrically linked to very different perceptions of eligible inequalities” (*Ibid.*, p. 159).

In an effort to overcome these indeterminations in the political and social history of modernity, concepts emerge that emphasize to the point of exaggeration certain features at the expense of others at the cost of possible reversals of democracy against itself. Rosanvallon defines these cases as borderline democracies and distinguishes three large groups – minimalist, essentialist and polarized democracies. The minimalist vision of democracy is concerned with specifying the means and conditions preventing democracy from degenerating into a dictatorship (Karl Popper) or a dangerous exercise of the “popular will” (Schumpeter). Essentialist democracies oppose democratic formalism (elections, voting procedures, etc.) and advocate building a communitarian social order (the communist vision of democracy). Populisms refer to polarized democracies. Their

particular way of resolving democratic uncertainties is to subordinate the parties to a given relationship to a single category and absorb them into it. As Rosanvallon shows,

“[t]he imperative of representation is fulfilled by the mechanism of identification with the leader, the exercise of sovereignty through recourse to the referendum, the democratic character of an institution through the election of its leaders, the expression of the people through a face-to-face meeting without intermediaries with the powers that be” (*Ibid.*, 165).

Society has been reduced to an elementary dichotomy, which has radicalized and polarized all aspects of public life. This way of resolving contradictions leads, according to Rosanvallon, to “democratorship/démocrature”³, which is nothing but a turning of democracy against itself.

From a critique of populism to an alternative democratic vision

Consistent in his approach to examine each phenomenon in its theoretical and historical dimensions, Rosanvallon concludes his analysis with a critique of key theoretical ideas of populism as they have been applied in practice. Emphasis is placed on 1) the question of the referendum, rarely subjected to in-depth research despite its central role in the populist conception of the functioning of democracy, 2) on the vision of polarized democracy with its rejection of mediating bodies in the relationship between the rulers and the ruled, and 3) on the conditions making possible the transformation of a given political regime into a democracy.

How to preserve the ultimate meaning of the referendum for democratic practice?

This question perhaps most accurately sums up Rosanvallon’s critical democratic theory of the referendum, which goes beyond both the populist exaltation of the referendum and the liberal skepticism of its possible risks. The key to overcoming this lies in identifying four blind spots in the use of referendum and showing ways to overcome their shortcomings. First of all, it is a matter of blurring the concept of responsibility in the referendum. The referendum decision leaves responsibility undefined, unaddressed, because as Rosanvallon points out, “[t]he people as a civic body is by construction irresponsible, since it is the creative power of a given political order. When the result of a vote does not produce the expected consequences, it is therefore disarmed” (*Ibid.*, p. 177). This does not mean rejecting the referendum as a means of governance, but specifying the conditions and modalities for its implementation, as well as the issues that can be submitted to a referendum – those that require unequivocal decisions similar to local referendums with a limited subject of inquiry.

The second pitfall of the referendum is the mismatch between a decision and the will to act. Precisely because politics is above all the creation of policies and projects for their implementation over time, it requires a will, a desire for long-term engagement, as opposed to a decision that is implemented here and now. This explains the restrictions

on the use of the referendum in individual national constitutions (there are no cases of referendum on issues of tax policy and diplomacy).

The downplaying of deliberation is another shortcoming of the practice of referendums. Offering a choice between two predetermined and irreducible options, referendums not only reduce the possible solutions, but deprive the citizen of the opportunity to have his voice heard not as an electoral unit, but as an autonomous, reasonable, specific point of view. Therefore, Rosenvallon's proposed path to the revival/renewal of democracy lies in the expansion of deliberative practices, because deliberation 1) "has [...] the effect of producing sensitive and reasoned citizenship, and of reducing the simplifications that obscure the conditions for the institution of the social, and the recognition of the real divisions that make it up, and 2) can enable everyone to participate actively in political life. The ideal of participation lies in this permanent involvement, as much if not more than in the necessary electoral formalism" (*Ibid.*, p. 186).

Rosanvallon is not uncritical of another political practice associated with the referendum, that of absolutizing the majority vote. The pitfalls of such a practice for the democratic functioning of society are both in terms of presenting the majority result as irreversible (the case of Brexit is indicative) and in terms of the normative procedures for institutionally putting the result into action (precisely because these mechanisms are developed by the rulers, the ruled may find themselves deprived of their own vote).

Hence the coherent with respect to Rosanvallon's critical theory conclusion that "[r]ecourse to a referendum [...] can only be circumstantial. There is more democratic vitality and direct democracy in the practice of initiative than in that of referendum, because citizens can always remain active in this way, without running the destructive risk of seeing themselves reduced to impotent sovereignty" (*Ibid.*, pp. 194 – 195).

How to preserve democratic principles without deforming them in their application?

Rosanvallon's critique of the populist concept of polarized democracy is in effect a theoretical defense of the founding principles of democracy and a solid argument for the idea that only by respecting their complexity can a real political community and a society of equals be achieved.

Starting from the central thesis of the populists about the undemocratic character of non-validated by popular vote instances between rulers and ruled, Rosanvallon manages to reveal the cognitive chain of absolutizations, omissions, mergers, indistinctions, substitutions, through which various principles that underpin democratic processes, procedures and institutions, are deformed. The rejection of instances and courts that are not sanctioned by the popular vote is in fact "the absolutization of legitimation through the ballot box" (*Ibid.*, p. 197) because of the conflation of two things in the democratic vote. Simultaneously "a technique for selection (and for decision) and a principle of justification" (*Ibid.*), the popular vote is associated with the idea of forming a common will, and the people is seen as an expression of the whole society. That is

an equal sign is placed between majority and unity. Even if there is a practical utility (arbitration between different interests, choice between visions), the majority principle does not override the substantial value of the common will as the foundation of the democratic ideal driving the project of a common history. In terms of representation, the principle of general will implies “power of any” and “power of none”. Through these two expressions, Rosanvallon further develops the idea of the people-principle as the embodiment of both equality (anyone can represent the collective we) and impartiality (no one, exercising power, can benefit from any advantage or privilege). And returning to the social complexity of the real people, the sociologist Rosanvallon shows the empirical failure of the populist, socially and politically harmful, mystique about the unified people, and proposes a sociology of trajectories that takes into account both social conditions and positions as well as social situations, able to represent the socially variable and mobile reality of a people more adequately than existing sociological categorizations of social divisions.

How to prevent a possible “democratorship”?

Rosanvallon’s short answer is by knowing the factors that allow a regime that came as a result of an electoral populist wave to transform into a *democratorship*. According to him, there are three prerequisites, the independent or joint action of which create the conditions for the possibility of a substantial change of political governance while preserving the democratic facade, namely “the establishment of a philosophy and policy of irreversibility; a dynamic of institutional polarisation and political radicalisation; an epistemology and morality of radicalization” (*Ibid.*, pp. 228 – 229). To Rosanvallon’s credit, he looks at the concrete practical implementations of each premise. In populist regimes, irreversibility is not only proclaimed, it is institutionally entrenched through two instruments – holding constituent parliaments/assemblies, completely remodeling the institutions, and creating constitutional opportunities for the re-election of already elected rulers. “Direct brutalization of institutions” and “strategies to gradually devitalize them” are two mechanisms by which institutional polarization and political radicalization in countries with populist rule take place. If Hugo Chavez personifies the process of brutalizing the institutions by electing the Constituent Assembly in a non-constitutional way (i.e. not foreseen by the current Constitution), which dissolves all existing institutions and replaces them with new ones immediately after coming to power in 1999, Viktor Orbán is a master of the gradual suffocation of democratic institutions. The 2012 constitutional reform under the rules is in fact Orbán’s “Trojan horse” to “tame” the Constitutional Court by prohibiting it from referring to its own post-1989 jurisprudence and limiting the policy initiative of all future institutions that do not would be in the hands of Fidesz. The strategy that leads to generalized polarization is the imposition of a discourse of suspicion, accusation and doubt, blurring the distinction between fact and opinion and constructing the image of opponents as amoral and corrupt, protecting foreign interests, as opposed to populist leaders embodying the common good and the common will. The most worrying result of this

“cognitive corruption of democratic debate” (*Ibid.*, p. 240) is the compromising of the very essence of democracy as “an open and pluralistic political community” (*Ibid.*, p. 241).

Facing an alternative development of democracy

Rosanvallón’s critical theory of democracy is positive. It seeks and finds a way out of the three borderline types of democracy – minimalist, essentialist and populist, because it manages to discover their fundamental theoretical error. By reducing and radicalizing the democratic project, all three visions of democracy overlook its internal contradictions, which underlie its incompleteness and openness. Therefore, the possible alternative is

“to broaden democracy to give it substance, to multiply its modes of expression, its procedures and its institutions. The truth of democracy does not lie in the supposed perfection of one of its modalities, but in the recognition that its ideal can only be approached by superimposing its approximations, adding up all the separately imperfect modalities that can be envisaged to give it shape. It is the derivative of its possibilities...” (*Ibid.*, p. 246).

Precisely because democracy is not a fixed, once-and-for-all given model, ways to overcome crises must be invented. Thus, to solve the crisis of representativeness, Rosanvallón proposes different ways, called *interactive democracy*, in which permanent instances are created between voters and elected for consultation, information and reporting; *narrative democracy* where citizens’ experiences can be publicly heard; *democracy of the precise determination of the principles* regulating the relations between the governing and the governed, allowing subsequently a true appropriation of power by the citizens; a *democracy of trust*, possible by observing two basic principles – that of integrity and of speaking the truth (*parrèsia* according to Foucault).

Only in realizing the fact that „democracy is first and foremost a system that never stops questioning itself“ (*Ibid.*, p. 252), and with real actions to search for new forms and solutions, populism can lose its appeal.

Conclusion

Rosanvallón’s book is in fact a generous invitation to dialogue with the philosophical, political and sociological traditions of understanding democracy as a political and societal project and to rethink the contemporary Bulgarian political reality.

I would point to three authors who are absent from Rosanvallón’s analytical construct, an omission that does not diminish his critical theory, but rather raises questions about how to integrate produced knowledge into the world’s common scientific heritage. In the pages devoted to populism as an ideology that privileges the movement over party structures and the leader as the embodiment of the people, the reader expects to see the name of Hannah Arendt as one of the first researchers to problematize the transformation of classes into masses, the replacement of the party system with mass movements, the

replacement of the principle of action with ideology in her analysis of totalitarianism (Arendt 1993). Rosanvallon distinguishes populism from fascism and Nazism, but the structural similarity between them is at least worth noting. The other omission concerns the Hungarian sociologists Ivan Szelényi and Balint Magyar, whose analyses of the post-socialist transformation (Szelényi 2013) and the post-communist mafia state (Magyar 2014) show the creation of a new capitalist class completely subservient to power and the privatization of the state – conclusions reached by Rosanvallon in 2020. I would not suppose that, if the Hungarian researchers were known in France, Rosanvallon would not refer to them. The question remains why Central and Eastern Europe continues to have a modest presence in the world scientific literature despite its analytical achievements.

Otherwise, Rosanvallon's critical democratic theory gives us a solid analytical tool not only for reading the contemporary Bulgarian political reality, but also for searching for answers to questions specific to Bulgarian society: Why are there so many political parties with an overtly populist orientation in Bulgaria, with such a divided society? How to counteract the multitude of political populisms, some in power, others pretending to power, which, each in its own way, stifle democratic institutions and erode democratic principles? What is the responsibility of educational institutions and social sciences for the rise of populism in Bulgarian society? Where to start overcoming political apathy and political skepticism, which in Bulgaria are a stronger engine of populism than political dissatisfaction?

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NOTES

- 1 Pierre Rosanvallon's books have been published in 26 countries of the world, including and in Bulgaria. *Counter-Democracy*, published in France in 2006 (*La Contre-Démocratie. La politique à l'âge de la défiance*), was published in Bulgarian by East-West publishing house (Iztok-Zapad) in 2012 with a foreword by Ivaylo Ditchov “When we lose, what do we gain”.
- 2 It is about the referendum and popular initiative procedures, removal of elected representatives at various levels (from judges and sheriffs to governors), and the primary system adopted in several states, proposed by the Progressive Movement in the USA. However, the merciless criticism of the parties did not call into question the general constitutional structure of the country. “In France, the introduction of proportional representation, the establishment of the first elements of a welfare state, the development of trade unionism and labor laws:

all this had helped to ward off the spectre of impotence that had been one of the main elements fuelling the populist proposals at the dawn of the twentieth century” (Rosanvallon 2020, p. 132).

- 3 Rosanvallon points out that formed by the fusion of the words “democracy” and “dictatorship”, the term “democratorship/démocrature” first appeared in the dictionary Le Petit Robert in 2019 to denote “a political regime that combines democratic appearances with an authoritarian exercise of power”.

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